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EDITORIAL

That instructors charged with the teaching of Freshman English, especially such as have acquired the Doctor's degree, are as a rule elaborately mistrained for the subject they are fated to teach, is obvious to any open-minded observer. Indeed, so apparent is the incongruity, that it has long been a theme for ironical comment. Freshman English means, in the main, English composition. Teachers of Freshman English should, therefore, be specifically trained for teaching English composition, particularly to beginners. Well, are they? Not in the least. With few exceptions they are trained as if they were to lecture on obscure problems of English literature to small groups of graduate students. What happens when they secure positions in our colleges and universities is really too harrowing to relate, but one phase of the perennial catastrophe is pointedly suggested by the following letter from a professor of English in a leading university: "What we want in this institution is men who will teach English composition to Freshman classes all the rest of their lives, and never weary of it. The present instructors expect after a few years to be promoted to the teaching of literature."

The main reason for this awkward, if not ridiculous, state of affairs, is not far to seek. It springs, in large measure, from a strange reluctance on the part of teachers and university authorities to recognize frankly two distinct types of ability—one the ability to pursue research in English literature, the other the ability to teach English composition. It has long been assumed that everyone who possesses the first is by the grace of God endowed with the second; whereas in fact the two, though not incompatible, are rarely combined in high degree in the same person, and for their full development seem to require quite diverse kinds of training. There are, at any rate, many gifted students of literature who should be enjoined, by process of law if necessary, from handling classes in composition, so obvious is their loathing of the task and so depres-

sing their influence upon the spirits of their students. On the other hand, a considerable number of persons who are now engaged in teaching literature would doubtless be far happier and more contented if they gave over their pretended enthusiasms for literary research and settled down to the teaching of composition.

If what has been said is not a distortion of the facts, the first step in training candidates for Freshman English would appear to be the separation of these two types of teachers. If a candidate, when he is interrogated in confidence, confesses, albeit shamefacedly, that he prefers to teach composition and will be content to teach it all his days, he should be accepted and encouraged. If, on the other hand, he says that, although he detests the teaching of composition, he is willing to endure it for a little time as a halfway house on the road to literature, he should not only be rejected, but should be branded on the forehead with some sign that will indicate his ineligibility to all beholders. Nothing less than this will protect the innocent Freshman from his natural foe.

As regards the specific kind of training that will be most helpful for teachers of composition, there is as yet some confusion. The course recently instituted at Harvard and described by Mr. Greenough in the February number of the *English Journal* seems to be mainly another course, added to those already offered, in the art and practice of writing English. This looks, no doubt, in the right direction, but, after all, goes only a little way. Good writers, to be candid, are not always good teachers. The classic case is that of Freeman, the historian, who, when the opportunity came to assist a teacher of composition with his advice, could only blurt out, "Tell them to write short sentences"—a most unfortunate injunction when addressed to a generation already inclining to a jerky, spasmodic style of expression. Very recently a well-known man of letters who was asked to address a university class excused himself on the ground that he could not think of anything to say about his art that could possibly occupy more than five minutes. On the other hand, while it does not follow that poor writers are always good teachers, yet it must be frankly conceded that many good teachers write "wi' deeficulty"—not ungrammatically or solecistically, of course, but with a heavy hand. They are like Kami in

Kipling's *The Light That Failed*, "who was a leaden artist but a golden teacher if the pupil were only in sympathy with him."

No, skill in the art does not necessarily mean skill in teaching the art. In training for the teaching of composition, therefore, over and above the cultivation of a respectable prose style, there should be the study of what may be called the strategy of the classroom—the art of storming the fortress of the student's indifference, of arousing his interest in the thing he is to write about, and of making him willing and even eager to communicate his knowledge and enthusiasm to others. Possibly these are qualifications that must come by nature if they come at all; and yet it would seem to be not impossible to frame a course of study that should develop in this direction the potentialities of the born teacher of composition and make him many times more proficient than he would otherwise become. Perhaps such courses already exist and flourish and accomplish their perfect work, but if so the light (as yet) shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not.

F. N. S.

The publication of a special monograph by the New England Association of Teachers of English calls attention to the death of Samuel Thurber, of Boston, whose name is familiar to everyone who has given the least attention to the literature of the teaching of English. A man of great force and earnestness and a writer possessed of a graceful and trenchant style, Mr. Thurber, in the period from 1890 to 1902, became easily the most influential of those who entered the forum to discuss the aims and methods of high-school English. His articles in the *Academy*, the *School Review*, and the *Journal of Pedagogy* were widely read and are still quoted; the visitors to his classroom in the Girls' High School of Boston were many and enthusiastic; and he was often called upon to address assemblies of teachers.

His views were radical, but have in large measure prevailed. He saw clearly the necessity of co-operation of all departments in the inculcating of good habits of expression; rhetorical theory and emphasis upon the technique of composition at the expense of

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abundant practice he thought unwise; he decried the practice of smothering the English masterpieces with annotations, and would have the pupils hunt up the necessary facts for themselves; methods of teaching seemed to him far less important than a keen appreciation and much well-digested knowledge; above all, he recognized the function of the public school as the people's college, and insisted that its courses and activities must not be determined by the idea of preparation for higher institutions.

Mr. Thurber's last years were delightfully spent in the serene enjoyment of his books, and in their company he quietly passed away. The record of his life and his numerous excellent sayings concerning the task which occupies so many of us are a grateful legacy insured to us by an old friend, Dr. George A. Bacon, and the Association with which he was so long and so closely identified.

The leaven of the Hopkins report on the "Cost and Labor of English Teaching" seems to be working. In a few instances, at least, the authorities have yielded gracefully to the facts and have doubled, or nearly doubled, the English force. This is encouraging news. Those who have given the matter even a little serious consideration agree that all other solutions combined offer less in the way of solving the English problem than the simple expedient of providing a sufficient number of English teachers. And the gratifying fact always to be borne in mind is that, even when this is done, the expense of the subject will not equal that of science, so long intrenched in the place of privilege, or of the newer industrial training. That being the case, let us not be too modest, brethren.

Nothing concerning the recent meeting of the National Education Association at Salt Lake City is more worthy of praise than the notably good reports printed by the local newspapers. This was due in part to the very efficient service of the new publicity department of the Association in charge of Mr. J. W. Searson, of the Kansas Agricultural College, but it was due also to the sane and intelligent attitude of the newspaper editors. Abstracts of the various papers and addresses of the con-

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vention were faithfully and accurately published, while certain important speeches were printed in full. There was no attempt, moreover, to exaggerate convention gossip or appeal to sensation lovers. The papers paid their readers the compliment of supposing them capable of enjoying something more edifying than a squabble or a dog fight.

This is much more than can be said for the press in the large cities in which the conventions of the N.E.A. have been held for the last two or three years. Query: Do such newspapers represent the taste and advancement of the people of those cities, or merely a small fraction of the population, including the reporters and the city editors?

As announced elsewhere, preparations are well under way for the third annual meeting of the National Council. This promises to be even more notable than that of last year. The meeting of delegates is to be better provided for, the section meetings will be fewer and therefore larger, a final report on grammatical terminology will be offered, the preparation of teachers and the improvement of conditions will be discussed, and, best of all, more leaders from the South and from other parts not well represented last year will be present. The success of the meeting will depend largely upon the interest which the members of the Council and the officers of the various societies affiliated with it manifest. Each should resolve not only to attend in person but to urge attendance on the part of others. Scarcely any effort can be too great in view of the pleasure and profit to be had both from the programs and from personal contact. Come, and come early.

The Third Annual Meeting